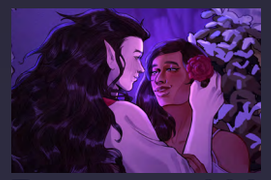
Castlevania
Sonata of Seasons

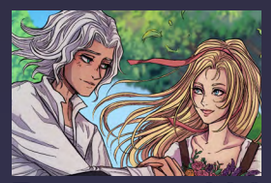
Contents of the Zine

Spring



Page 009
Kal

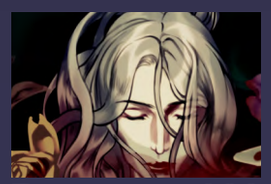
“Pushing Daisies, Planting Roots”
Page 010-027
Jess



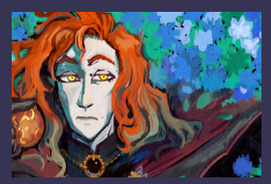
Page 006
syderalis

Page 028
func44

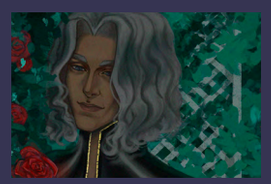
Page 007
Ashe



Page 029
func44

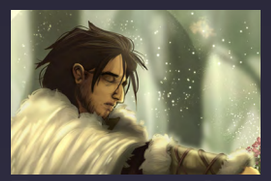


Page 008
Hermannco

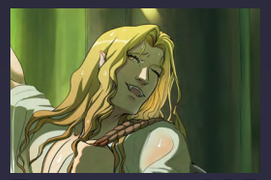


Page 030
Saint Rook

Summer

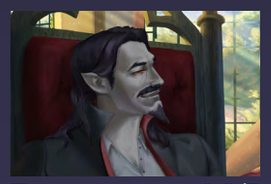


Page 031
Pop

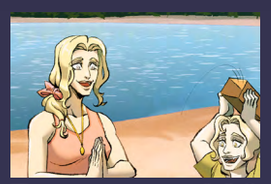


Page 035
Crimsontangerines

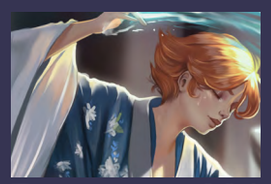
Page 036
trace



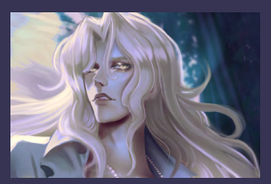
Page 037
Toby Fox



Page 038
lizkreates



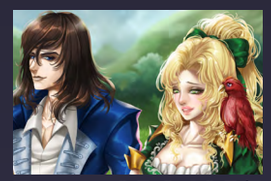
Page 034
LittlekittenAmy



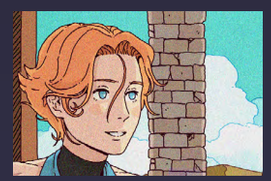
Page 039
LittlekittenAmy

Autumn

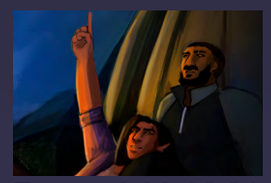
“Punishing Heat”
Page 040-55
Vanish



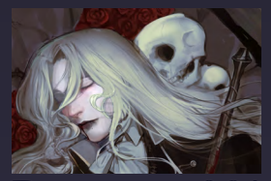
Page 056/057
FKDemetri



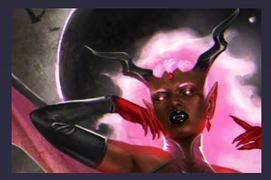
Page 058/059
galaxygaby



Page 060/061
Mystery



Page 064
Brkenteacup

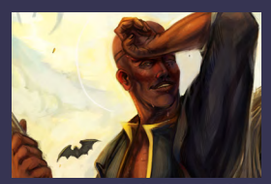


Page 065
GrathVonGraven

Page 066
Juniper Chuang

Page 067
Voidbitzz

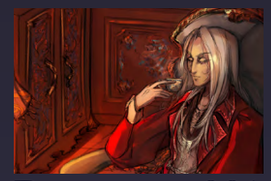
“I Hear the Geese”
Page 068-081
Star



Page 082/083
Elaiz

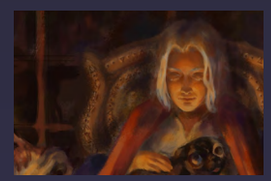
Winter

Page 084/086
Katon



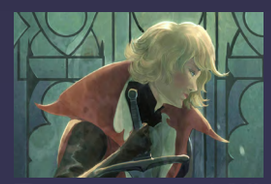
Page 091
Rosangela Ludovico

“Funeral Rights”
Page 092 - 105
Aquila



Page 106
Mal Cao

Page 107
GOMHYU



Page 108
Madbrake

Page 090
Mal Cao

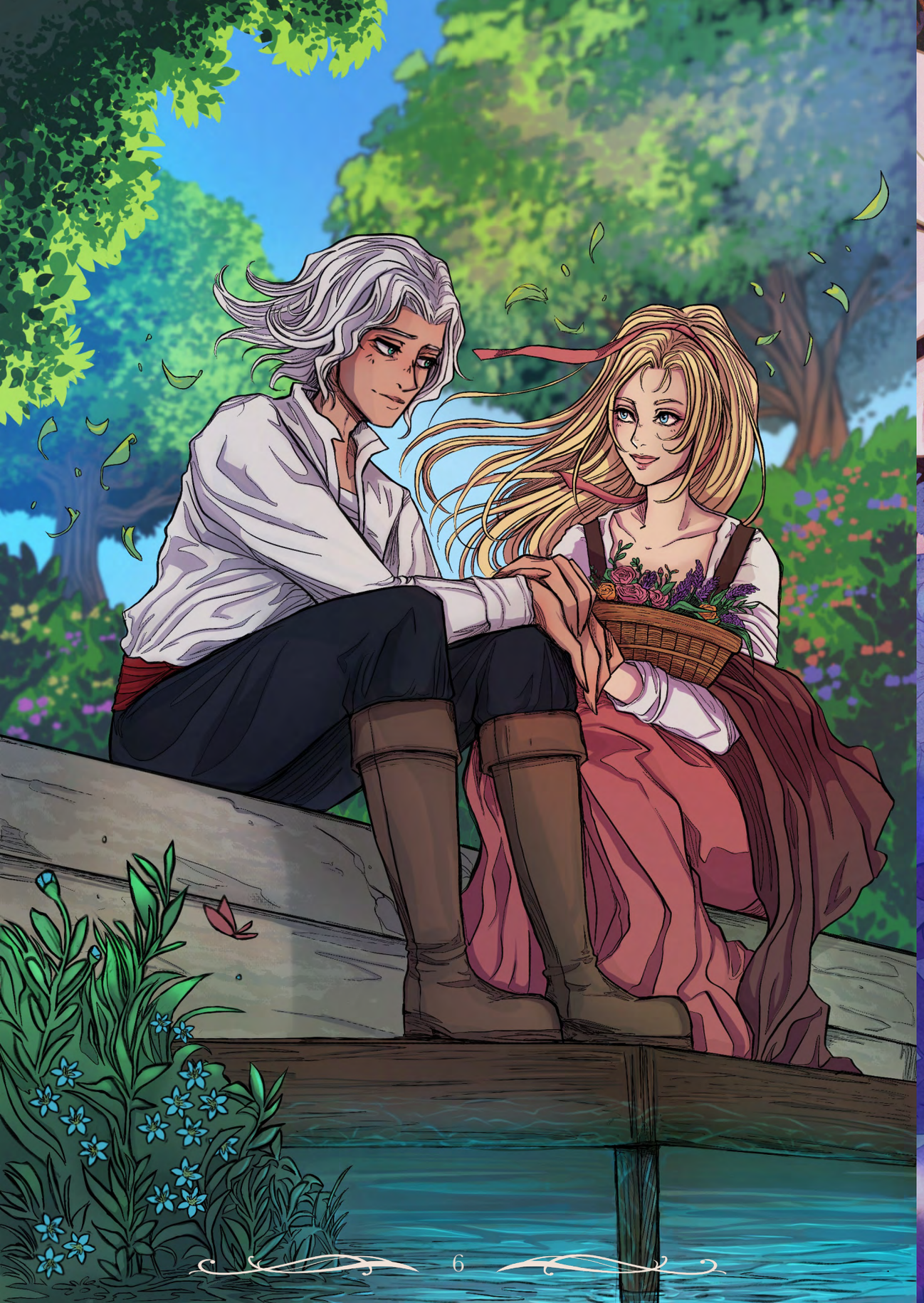
Creditpages
Merch Pieces
Mod Team

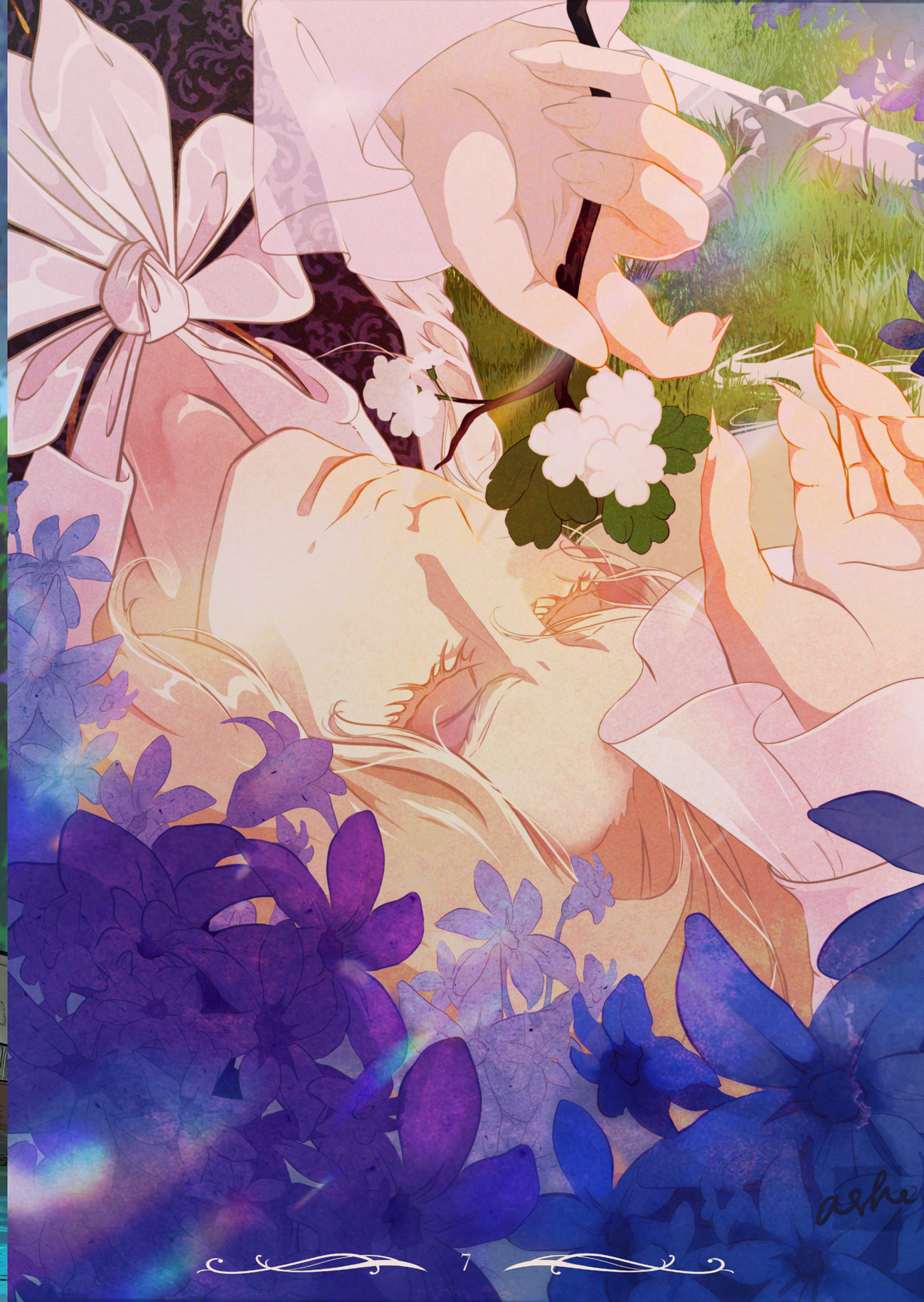
Castlevania
Sonata of Seasons

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!
Bring the singer, bring the nester;
Give the buried flower a dream;
Make the settled snowbank steam;
Find the brown beneath the white;
But whate'er you do tonight,
Bathe my window, make it flow,
Melt it as the ice will go;
Melt the glass and leave the sticks
Like a hermit's crucifix;
Burst into my narrow stall;
Swing the picture on the wall;
Run the rattling pages o'er;
Scatter poems on the floor;
Turn the poet out of door.

"To the thawing wind" - by Robert Frost

Spring




ashe

HERMANOS

Pushing Daisies, Planting Roots

Lisa from the Village of Lupu was many things. She was ridiculously intelligent. She was insanely rude. She was crass and self-serving and *wildly* talkative.

She was obsessed with learning, which only made it that much more entertaining to teach her. She was beautiful, although he would never say it to her face. She was kind.

But above all, Lisa of Lupu was *stubborn*.

Vlad had been resting in his study one morning as the sun had begun to crest in the sky. His eyelids fluttered lazily as he skimmed a page in his book. He had raised his hand to turn the page when something slammed onto the table beside him.

He eyed the small packet and garden trowel on the table before glancing up. Lisa stood over him, hands on her hips.

"I'm going to plant a garden," she told him.

He raised an eyebrow, closing his book. "Whatever for? I own all the herbs you could possibly need for your tinctures."

"Not herbs– *flowers*. I was thinking I'd start with roses," She gestured to the packet on the table. "I picked these up from a woman in town. She says that they'll sprout white rather than red or pink."

"Why on Earth would you waste your time planting a garden?"

She frowned, her lip curling in that specific way that he had come to recognize meant that she was annoyed. "It's not a waste! I think this place is rather lacking in beauty, don't you? Such a dark, ghastly castle needs a breath of fresh air, I think."

Vlad snorted despite himself. "You'll be planting them outside, then?"

"Well, obviously. I'm not going to be planting them in your fireplace, now am I?"

"You might as well. Once I decide to move the castle, all of your work will disappear. It will be for naught."

She smiled, shaking her head. "That's the issue with you vampires. You spend so much time enveloped in your *immortal vampire bullshit* that you forget how to enjoy the small things. The things that *don't* last forever."

Vlad frowned. "I just think it odd to waste so much of your short life caring for something that will disappear in an instant."

"Well, that's *why* we care, isn't it?" She asked, snatching up the seeds and the trowel. "Life is fleeting, we're all going to die– *well*. Most of us will, anyway. You've got to find a way to make the most of it."

"Hmph," Vlad huffed. "I suppose. Will you start now, then?"

She strolled over to the window of his study, lifting the heavy curtain to glance outside. "Hmmm…I believe I will, yes. Your window here has such a lovely view out onto the ground below," she turned to face him, smiling mischievously. "Shall I plant them directly under your window, so that you may have a nightly view of my *waste of time?"*

He huffed out a laugh. “Do as you please.”

“I *shall*, thank you very much,” she grinned as she left the room, leaving the curtain askew. He grabbed his book, settling himself into his chair to read.

It took approximately half an hour before he found himself distracted by his overwhelming curiosity, unable to focus on the book. He moved toward the window, carefully shielding himself from the sun’s harmful rays before pulling the curtain aside to gaze down at Lisa’s working form.

Even from this distance, he could see the efforts of her labor— the sweat on her brow, the soft dirt covering her hands. Her hair glowed in the morning sunlight, each strand sparkling as if it were the finest spun gold. He watched, hidden by his cape, as she toiled away, singing softly to herself as she buried the seeds beneath the earth.

It was an enchanting sight.

He scoffed to himself, pulling the curtain closed with a flourish. The woman was an utter fool. She would see soon enough, when the flowers were ripped from the ground with the force of the castle’s magic. Nothing like that was meant to last.

They were lying in bed together when she spoke, her voice nothing but a whisper in his ear.

“I want to plant camellias this time.”

He stirred, blinking sleep out of his eyes. “Hmm?”

“Camellias. I think they would look nice in the garden. Pink ones, I reckon. What do you think?”

She snuggled herself closer into his side, resting her head gently on his chest. He smiled as he looked down at her, her face graced with the faintest of smile lines. The ring on her finger glinted in the soft candlelight.

“I think that you know what I’m about to say.”

She sighed dramatically, flopping back onto her side of the bed. “Yes, yes, I know. *Your gardens will not last, Lisa, you’re wasting your time, Lisa—”*

“Lisa—”

“Lisa, Lisa, *Lisa!* Even when you’re complaining, you can’t get my name out of your mouth!” She smirked, reaching up to tuck a strand of dark hair behind his ear. “Do you truly think of me that often? Can’t get me out of your head?”

He smiled, taking her hand and bringing it to his lips. “I think of you every morning and every evening, my love.”

“Only mornings and evenings? Well, that’s hardly any time at all!”

He laughed, lying back against the pillows. She smiled up at him, grin wide on her face, and he felt his cold, dead heart soar in his chest.

What did he ever do to deserve her? He honestly couldn’t say.

He sat up, pushing the blankets aside. “Come with me.”

"Hmm? Where are you going?"

"I'm going to move the castle." He pulled a loose shirt over his head and started walking towards the door.

"Wait– WHAT?" Lisa leapt to her feet, blocking his path with her arms outstretched. "You can't move the castle again! You just moved it! What's the point in doing so again?"

"I suppose you'll just have to wait and see, hmm?" He smiled devilishly, pushing his way past her.

She planted her feet and crossed her arms over her chest. "No, *not* happening. You will *tell me* what you are planning, sir, or else I will not move from this spot!"

Oh, there was that stubborn streak rearing its ugly head. He looked down at her, raising an eyebrow challengingly. "Truly?"

She glared up at him, fire burning behind her eyes. *"Try me."*

He sighed, barely able to conceal the smile on his lips. "Very well then. I suppose you leave me no choice."

"Now, what is that supposed to m– *HEY!"*

Without even blinking, Vlad grabbed her around the waist and tossed her over his shoulder, ducking his head to avoid her wildly kicking legs. He walked her out of the room, making his way down the long corridors towards the room where the transportation machine was stored.

Lisa continued to twist and kick at him. "Vlad– *Vlad*– This isn't funny!"

He chuckled to himself. "I disagree. I am finding this all rather *hilarious."*

She sighed heavily, the fight leaving her body as she collapsed against his shoulder. "*Fine.* Take me away then, you oaf."

"Oh, hush now. Don't start your pouting."

He moved them into the large mechanical room, making his way up the dias to settle himself before the gently floating polyhedron. With Lisa slung over his shoulder, he raised his hand, allowing the energy to course through his veins as he conjured an image of their destination in his mind's eye. The polyhedron began to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster, until the form became a whirring, indistinguishable mess. He felt the castle lurch under his feet and watched as the landscape in the windows around him blinked out of existence. The ground shuddered as they landed, plumes of dust curling off the floor. He hauled Lisa off of his shoulder, placing her carefully on her feet.

"Where are we?"

He took her hand, leading her towards the door. "Let's go find out. Shall we?"

He led her out of the room, through the long corridors towards the grand spiraling staircase. As they approached the entrance, he took both of her hands in his, bringing them to his lips.

"You're rather affectionate today, hmm? What is it?" She smiled at him, her eyebrows raised curiously.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to plant your camellias this time, my love."

She frowned, narrowing her eyes. "Whyever not? What are you scheming?"

He smiled, reaching past her and pushing the door open. "This time, I have brought the garden *to you."*

He took a step back before the sunlight could touch him, letting the door creak open before her. Her eyes widened as her sight fell onto the landscape before them– verdant fields of wildflowers, their petals decorated with vibrant colors that she had never seen before. A small clearing sat at the entrance to the castle, bushes of honeysuckle sheltering the area from prying eyes. The fragrant smell of the flowers filled her nose as she laughed in disbelief.

"Oh… Oh, Vlad, this is *beautiful.* Darling, how did you–"

"Shhhh. You talk too much." He smirked at the flash of annoyance that crossed her face, but it was quickly replaced with an overwhelming smile.

She grabbed his hand, pulling him towards the door. "Well, come on then! I want to explore my new garden!"

The smile dropped from his face and he quickly pulled his hand away. "Lisa–"

"What?" She turned back towards him, joy fading from her expression as realization hit her. "Oh, *Vlad.* Have I been tormenting you, placing things like this in the sunlight? Outside of your reach? It was not intentional, darling–"

He shushed her, taking her hand again. "You have nothing to apologize for, my love. I was the one who brought you here," he looked out towards the field of wildflowers, sighing softly. "If anything, perhaps I am

tormenting myself. I cannot resist the way you look in the sunlight. If there is in fact a God in this world, perhaps that is his punishment for me– making his most beautiful creature more radiant than the sun itself."

She stood quietly for a moment, avoiding his eyes by looking at the place where their fingers intertwined. "If there is a God, then he has been far too cruel to you, I think. You don't deserve any kind of punishment."

He huffed out a laugh. "Perhaps."

She released his hand, closing the heavy door behind her. She turned to face him as she leaned back, a mischievous smile gracing her features.

"We'll explore together later, hmm? I can think of *far* better uses of my time while we wait for the sun to set."

Vlad laughed, holding a hand out for her to take. "You wish to devote your time to the dissection of certain internal organs, then? That *has* been an area you've been struggling in recently."

"That is not what I meant, and *you know it!"*

"I told you before, I am perfectly fine! I just need to stretch my legs."

Vlad rushed to Lisa's side, supporting her as she struggled to get out of bed. She leaned forward, shifting her weight to rest her hands on the nightstand beside her. She took deep breaths, her shoulders shuddering as she held herself up.

He sighed, shaking his head. “You need to be more careful, my love.”

“I’m *fine!* You worry too much, honestly.”

“I feel like I am allowed to be worried, Lisa. The baby–”

She took his hand, placing it on her stomach. “The baby will be fine. *I,* however, may go *mad* if I am forced to spend another moment in this bed.”

He rubbed a hand over her bump, attempting to calm his stressed mind. “You really should be resting. You’ve grown so weak recently, you can’t just be wandering the castle–”

“Shhhhh, wait. It’s kicking.” She moved his hand down a bit, holding it against her stomach. “Do you feel it?”

He paused, waiting to feel the tell-tale kick against his palm. “I don’t feel anything. Are you sure–”

“Who’s the doctor here? Quiet, just wait.”

He held back a comment about how they were technically both doctors, but waited in silence. After a moment, he felt it– a small, sharp impact against his hand. Lisa winced slightly at the hit but beamed with joy. Vlad sank onto his knees, resting his ear against her stomach. He sighed happily as the soothing rhythm of a heartbeat filled his ears.

“My son…” He whispered to himself.

Lisa placed a hand in his hair, casually playing with the strands. “Son? Who told you that?”

“I can tell. He has a strong heartbeat.”

“Oh, *of course,* my mistake. I must have forgotten the lesson about how the strength of the heartbeat correlates to the sex of the child,” she laughed, pulling Vlad to his feet again. She planted a soft kiss on his lips, resting her head against his shoulder.

He sighed, bringing a hand to clasp the back of her head. “I know you hate being stuck in here. I’ve tried to make it as comfortable as possible.”

Lisa glanced around the room, every surface covered with vases full of flowers. “Bringing the garden to me once again, hmm? It’s your fault that I’m stuck here in the first place. You really must stop being so *undeniably* tempting.”

“My apologies,” he smirked. “What can I do to make it easier?”

She thought for a moment, trailing her hand through a bouquet on the nightstand. She plucked a primrose from the bunch and slid it behind his ear before shifting backwards, settling back into bed.

“Will you read to me? I’m *horrifically* bored, and balancing a book on top of our child seems like poor maternal etiquette.”

He laughed, pulling a novel from her bookshelf. “Of course, my love. Settle in, then.”

She fell asleep quickly after that, the gentle lull of his voice easing her to sleep. She snored softly as he stood, pressing a gentle kiss to her forehead.

“Good night, Lisa,” he breathed, pressing another kiss to her stomach. “Good night, my son.”

If Lisa shone like the sun, Adrian was as radiant as the North Star. His Polaris, his guiding light—his *son.*

The boy was the spitting image of his mother— flowing golden hair and pale skin that seemed to glow with mystical energy. Even his eyes, distinct from both his parents, held a sense of beauty and magic— twin gold coins shining in the sunlight.

He grew incredibly fast, both mentally and physically. He was starved for knowledge, reading every book that he could get his hands on. Lisa taught him during the day, sciences and medicines that she had learned throughout the years, as well as the different flora and fauna in each new land that they traveled to. In the evenings, Vlad would take him out under the stars, teaching him different constellations and their mythologies.

"Father?" Adrian asked on one of those evenings when the three of them sat together, gazing at the stars. Lisa sat behind him, braiding small lilac blossoms into his hair.

"Yes, my son?"

"You're able to sit here with Mother and I under the stars at night. But Mother told me that the sun is just a larger star, and yet you can't be outside until it sets," he sat up, looking Vlad in the eyes with such a curious gaze that it made Vlad's heart clench in his chest.

"Yes, that's right. If I step into the light of the sun, I will die."

"But why?"

Vlad huffed out a laugh. "It is what happens to all vampires, my son. The light is dangerous. We must cast ourselves into darkness or face the consequences."

Adrian's eyes began to fill with tears. "You mean you'll burn? But I don't want you to!" He clambered away from Lisa's lap, rushing up and wrapping his small arms around his father. "Promise me that you won't go outside when the sun is out, Father!"

Vlad lifted his son into an embrace. "I had no plans to do anything of the sort, Adrian," he rubbed his back, soothing the boy's hiccuping sobs. "Don't cry, my son. It's alright."

Adrian rubbed a hand across his face, wiping away his tears. "I don't want you to leave. You or Mother," he wept, burying his face into Vlad's shoulder. "I don't want to be alone."

"Oh, my dear heart," Lisa called, coming up behind Adrian and wrapping her arms around him. "We are both here for you. And as long as I walk this Earth, you will *never* be alone."

Adrian sniffled, lifting his head to look at her. "Promise?"

"Promise," Lisa replied, pressing a kiss to his forehead. "Now Vlad, I believe you were telling our lovely son about Cassiopeia and Andromeda? I could stand to hear that story again myself."

She took a seat next to him, gathering Adrian in her lap as he began to recount the tale. Adrian's eyes shone with wonder as he spoke, and as he gazed at his family, Vlad knew the love in his chest burned brighter than any star.

The roar of the flames in his ears felt deafening as he stood, watching the cottage burn. This was wrong. Everything was *wrong.*

He barely took notice of the old woman in front of the house, laying flowers at the entrance. She spoke to him, but he could barely make out the words.

Forget-me-nots, he noted. *She brought her forget-me-nots. But I could never forget this.*

She's gone. She's dead.

The humans ***killed*** *her.*

Bloody tears pooled in his eyes, trailing down his face. He felt the fire of the wreckage wrap around him, enveloping him in an infernal pillar of flame. The old woman screamed, scrambling away from him, but he was already pulling himself into the sky, soaring towards Targoviste with a fury pulled directly from Hell.

His rage was hotter than the sun itself. He would burn the world for his love.

Blood filled Vlad's mouth as the wood pierced his chest, tears welling in his eyes. He looked down at the hands clutched around the stake, then felt

himself choke as he gazed into the eyes of his murderer.

His son. His guiding star. His *Adrian.*

Her Adrian.

The boy had frozen in terror, staring up at Vlad with a look of horror on his face. His eyes were wide and brimmed with tears, two gold coins reflecting Vlad's face back at him.

All Vlad could see in those eyes was a gaunt, hideous monster. He closed his eyes as the tears poured down his face, feeling his strength leave his body. His skin began to wrinkle and crumble, falling from his frame like grains of sand. He stumbled, pulling away from Adrian to turn his back on him. Even in his final moments, Vlad knew that he had to shield his son from this. He would not let him see his father burn.

"I'm sorry…"

"It's alright, Vlad. Everything will be alright."

His eyes burst open at the sound of a familiar, beckoning voice. The room transformed into a field, purple hyacinth flowers swaying around him. She stood a ways away from him, her hair shining like gold in the sunlight.

"Lisa…"

He started running, tripping over his own feet as he sped towards her. The flowers were crushed underfoot as he ran, desperate to reach her. She turned away, walking towards the horizon.

"*Lisa!* Please, wait for me!"

The sunlight glinted off of her hair, bright and overpowering. He watched as the edge of her dress caught flame, quickly spreading across her body. She screamed as the fire spread, the flowers burning as the entire field was set alight. He gathered her burning body in his arms, biting back screams of pain.

"I'm so sorry, Lisa. It's all my fault."

"It's alright, my love. Just let go." She planted a burning kiss on his lips as the flames overtook them both. The sun grew even larger in the sky, and Vlad felt himself burn away.

Vlad felt his eyes flicker open as a deep ache spread across his body. He was laying in a field, naked as the day he was born, blades of grass tracing against his skin. All around him lay tulips, dozens upon dozens lined in neat, perfect rows. They danced in the wind, every color imaginable– pinks and reds and vibrant yellows that shone like the sun.

"Vlad?"

His heart stopped.

He jumped to his feet and started running.

"Vlad?"

He could see her across the field– completely naked, her hair spread around her body like a curtain of spun gold. He watched as she spotted him, completely awestruck as she fully took him in. She took off running, tripping over her own feet as they pressed towards each other.

"Vlad!"

She crashed into him, wrapping her arms around him. He buried his face in her hair, holding onto her just as tightly. He felt her soft skin under his fingertips and felt tears well up in his eyes.

"Lisa… *oh, Lisa…* how are you *here?* You *died."*

"Well, so did *you."* Her voice was muffled against his chest. "I don't know. I know that I died, I've been *dead*, but… I don't *feel* dead anymore." She lifted her head, looking up into his eyes.

Vlad pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I missed you so desperately."

"I know," she leaned her forehead against his own. "I missed you too. More than I could possibly say."

Tears poured down his face as he held her impossibly close. *"I'm so sorry."*

"What for, darling?"

"I did… *horrible* things, Lisa. Things that I can never take back." He shook slightly as he spoke, his body wracked with silent sobs.

"Shhhh, it's alright." She pulled back, taking his face in her hands. "You were hurting. I saw how broken you were, how much your heart screamed in pain. I desperately wanted to ease your pain even the smallest bit." Her voice shook as her tears joined his own. "I'm sorry that I left you."

"No," Vlad shook his head frantically. "Don't *ever* apologize for something like that."

He leaned down, pressing his lips against hers. She pressed up into the kiss, the two of them shutting their eyes tight as the sunlight graced their skin.

There was no pain. Instead, there was *warmth.* Warmth and radiance and overwhelming love. As he pulled away from the kiss, he opened his eyes to see Lisa, teary eyed with the biggest, brightest smile on her face.

Her smile was bright enough to rival the sun.

Castlevania
Sonata of Seasons

Gather her sunshine,
Fancy her smile.
Remember, she'll stay
For but a short while.
So, dance in the joy
Of her warm Summer's day,
Before Autumn's foot soldiers
Chase her away.

"Summer Time Poem" - by Richard D Remler

Summer

tobyfoxart

Punishing Heat

Cholōllān, Ānāhuac
May 19, 1517

Olrox ignored the sound of someone ascending the temple steps as he prepared the incense. The summer sun would be rising soon, and the nighttime symphony of crickets would be replaced by the bustling of people through the streets below. People who would soon learn that they were no longer Tlaxcaltec–but Mēxihcah.

The footsteps reached the top of the temple and stopped. "I can hear your heart's song, Olrox," came the high priest's gravelly voice. "You go about angrily."

Olrox unclenched his jaw and held the incense over the flaming brazier until it caught fire, filling the air with perfumed smoke. "I am certain that your decision was made with a wisdom which I am too young and inexperienced to understand, Quetzalcōātzin," he gritted through his teeth.

The priest scoffed. "You are not my student anymore, Olrox. You may speak plainly with me."

He set the incense down and faced him. "This decision is going to get us all killed."

The man returned a placating smile. "...Let us bleed together," he offered, gesturing to one of the benches. "I can tell you of the vision I had."

Olrox fought the urge to roll his eyes. "You honor me, Quetzalcōātzin." They sat and unrolled their kits, each plucking from their contents a maguey thorn and scrap of parchment. Olrox watched as the older man pinched the sagging, bruise-dappled flesh of his thigh and drove the thorn through it–then out the other side. His blood was slow to begin flowing, its color dark with age.

Pressing his lips together, Olrox pricked his own thigh–wincing at the brief sting of pain. His blood bursted through immediately, bright red with vitality.

"I saw a quetzal perched upon the city gates," the high priest began. "An eagle dove to snatch it up, but then it flew away–and the eagle only smashed its head against the stone."

Olrox held the parchment to his thigh, catching the blood before it could dribble down his leg and onto his freshly swept floor. "...Fascinating."

"And then I saw a Jaguar, watching from the bushes. It waited for the quetzal to return, thinking it was safe–then devoured both it and the eagle's remains."

Olrox scoffed. "And am I supposed to be the eagle?"

"No."

"Then perhaps I might ask *you* to speak plainly with *me,"* Olrox suggested impatiently.

The priest clicked his tongue. “You think I have sided with the others on this matter because they are nobility. But there is no blood more noble than that of Quetzalcōātl, and it is his blood that we all share.”

“Well, if you did it for some other reason, I am not seeing it,” Olrox muttered, readying another thorn.

“I do not think you are the eagle, Olrox. I think you are the Jaguar. It is true that you are more clever, more graceful, more disciplined than they are. You have always been my brightest pupil.”

“And yet it is *their* path we are following,” Olrox said. This time when he pierced his thigh, he hardly felt the sting at all. “Our people have friends, brothers, lovers in Tlaxcallān. The implications are far more reaching than petty trade agreements.”

The priest sighed and pricked his other thigh. “You know Tenōchtitlan have had their eyes on our city for a long time.”

“And it’s because of their fear of Tlaxcallān that it has been *only* their eyes, and not their hands too.”

“Our neighbors are powerful warriors, yes. But–”

“If Tenōchtitlan expects us to enforce their embargo against Tlaxcallān, we’ll be starving them to death.” Olrox argued. “We’ll be making enemies of the only people powerful enough to resist their advances thus far.”

The priest hesitated. “Motēuczōmah Xocoyotzin would have forced our hands eventually.”

“There’s a reason they all send their heirs out here to be anointed by *our* priests,” Olrox sneered. “It is *we* who are the most sacred. We need not bow to anyone.”

The man chuckled, shaking his head. “Your breath is like fire, Tlamacazqui Olrox,” he said, patting his knee. “And that is why I believe you are destined for something greater.”

Olrox pulled at the length of maguey, threading it through his skin. “This won’t end well.”

“Quetzalcōātl will protect us,” the high priest said. “He always has.”

Olrox rolled his eyes. “How many centuries has it been since Quetzalcōātl chose a bearer? Or any god for that matter?” He wiped his thighs with the parchment and rose to his feet. “...No one is protecting us, Quetzalcōātzin,” he said, and dropped the bloodied scrap into the brazier to burn.

Cholōllān, Ānāhuac
October 22, 1519

Olrox’s heart pounded in his chest, his breaths noisy and hurried despite his desperate efforts to keep perfectly still, perfectly quiet. It had been hours now, but he could still hear them. The clinking of their armor, the *clop clop clopping* of the feet of the beasts they’d rode in on against the once-pristine cobbles, now stained as red with blood as the temple steps.

Gods, he hated being right.

Three days of hospitality they’d extended to these men. Food and drink, flowers and feathers, music and dance; the preparations for the upcoming

festival put on hold to give these strangers from a land called España a warm welcome–all at Motēuczōmah's request.

They should have known when they'd arrived accompanied by the Tlaxcaltec.

Their leader, a bearded man called Cortés, had carried himself with all the presumptuousness of lower nobility desperate to make a name for itself, and Olrox had to temper the scorn that burned in his lungs the longer he listened to him speak.

He'd had a sinister gleam in his eyes as he told them how beautiful Cholōllān was–his strange words translated for them by the Mayan woman he kept close at his side. But stranger than his speech, stranger than his appearance or manner of dress, was the way he and his companions kept huddled beneath the shade of their parasols for the entirety of their visit.

It was the middle of the rainy season, and while the townspeople had been desperate to enjoy what little sunlight had managed to break through the clouds–their honored guests seemed determined to avoid it at all costs.

Perhaps they believed the gods couldn't see through the clouds.

If Olrox peered up through the tangle of limbs he found himself in, he could see the feathered serpent, carved in stone.

He was supposed to have protected them.

Across the square, he could see the high priest's lifeless eyes, the skull behind them crushed by one of the beast's feet as if by a jaguar's jaws.

Metallic footsteps drew close, and the bodies atop him shifted as one was

dragged from the carnage. Olrox swallowed, watching as one of the men sniffed the body, wet his lips, and put his mouth to its throat to drink. Anger rose in his chest as the body turned sickly pale as it was drained of blood–drained of life. The already gray sky seemed to darken, and a strong breeze swept in from the west, and then the east, until it seemed to blow from all directions at once. Olrox felt a drop of rain land on his brow. Then another, and another.

I do not think you are the eagle, Olrox. I think you are the jaguar.

Someone grabbed his ankle, and Olrox willed himself to keep limp as he was dragged across the cobbles. He'd seen the way the men had laughed–delighted for the opportunity to play with their food when it struggled–and Olrox refused to give them the satisfaction. No, if they had the spine to look into his eyes, they would only see judgment.

He was pulled up against someone, and while he couldn't recognize any of the words they spoke, the voice he did. Never before had a voice filled him with such hatred, such anger, such heat.

The rain swelled into a downpour, and Olrox felt bearded lips brush against his neck. Thunder rumbled in the skies, and he felt fangs prick at his skin. Every inch of his body started to burn, as though his lungs were no longer big enough to contain his fury.

And then a flash of lightning pierced through the clouds, and everything went as white and hot as the sun.

Olrox woke with a start, gasping for air.

"He lives!" a voice shouted, followed by a chorus of cheers.

Several hands reached out to touch him, and Olrox swatted them away like mosquitos. "Where did they go!?"

The crowd surrounding him flinched back. They were gathered atop the old temple–a long-abandoned mound that was more a burial ground than a place of worship, overtaken by grass and moss as it was.

"Quetzalcōātzin," a man crouched beside him, "He has intervened! In our darkest moment, he chose you as bearer, and saved us!"

Olrox scowled and looked down the hill at what remained of Cholōllān, hoping it had just been a nightmare. But instead of a pristine city, he saw only destruction. A few dozen survivors were in the square, weeping over the corpses of sons and daughters, fathers and mothers. The scaffolds for the festival were all torn down, black smoke rising from the flames that still licked at them.

"You call this *intervention?"* Olrox scoffed. If this was divine intervention, it was far too little, far too late.

"Please–" a woman knelt beside him, offering a basket of maize and cotton and flowers. "My children live because of you, Quetzalcōātzin," she said, drawing a knife from the basket and bleeding one of her earlobes.

Olrox stopped her before she could cut into the other. "You *really* don't need to–"

"Quetzalcōātl has given us a bearer!" Someone shouted, "Adorn him with flowers! Give him songs!" And in a matter of seconds, a shower of petals

was raining over him, while voices began to sing.

"Enough!" Olrox snapped, smacking the petals off of his sweat-dampened skin and pulling himself up to his feet. "I am no Quetzalcōātzin," he insisted. "No bearer. Look around you. There are no *gods* here."

A boy wiggled his way through the crowd, holding up a fistful of feathers in dazzling shades of red and green. "It's true, Quetzalcōātzin!" He said, "Look!"

Olrox blinked his eyes into focus. Impossibly large and vibrantly colored, they made the feathers on even the emperor's headpiece look pitiful by comparison. He reached out to touch one, and a memory came flooding back to him. Movement so fast everything was a blur, but the chorus of the white men's screams was clear as birdsong, and the *feeling*–of anger, of power, of fearlessness–was sharp as a blade.

Olrox's heart began to pound. He touched his neck, feeling for a wound, and found two small incisions not even a finger's length apart.

Him? The bearer? The thought was ridiculous. He hadn't asked to be sent to the *calmecac,* and he certainly hadn't asked for *this.*

"Can I keep one?" The boy asked.

A breeze swept over him, and Olrox shook himself. "Yeah. Sure," he said,

voice and limbs trembling as he turned his back to them and stormed towards the square.

The weight of the collective grief was palpable as Olrox reached the center of the plaza, where mourners wept over the dead. He could recognize the first of them–an older man who stopped by the temple every morning to offer his blood–grieving a daughter who'd just married some months prior. Only a few days ago, he'd been telling Olrox how overjoyed he was to become a grandfather soon.

Olrox hesitated, looking out at all the fires to be put out, all the crushed petals to be swept up. Instead, he used his dagger to cut one of the tassels off of his *xicolli,* crouching down and using it to tie a lock of the corpse's hair. He cut it off and offered it to the old man–and when he didn't reach for it, Olrox took his hand and placed it in his palm.

"Tlamacazqui Olrox," the man sniffled through his tears, "What will become of their spirits? How are they to nourish the earth and repay the gods, if their blood has been taken from them?"

Olrox looked back over his shoulder at the small crowd still gathered atop the old temple. It was early morning now, and the sun was beginning to rise over it.

You are destined for something greater, the high priest had said. His talk of visions and destiny had grated Olrox then, but now as he looked out over what was left of the place he called home, the memory of power–of righteous fury–began to make its home in his chest.

"...Do not worry about their blood, *tateh,"* Olrox answered at last. "I will take it back."

Tenōchtitlan, Ānāhuac
July 1, 1520

Olrox was met with cheers as he stepped out into the sunlight atop the temple steps, where tens of thousands of Mēxihcah had gathered to hear him deliver a victory speech. It had taken some time for him to grow into his power, to map the extent of it. But once he had, and the people saw his beauty, they'd fallen to their knees and worshiped him.

Some followed him simply because they knew he was powerful–and that it would be in their best interest to declare their allegiance early, before the empire fell and a new one took its place. But others followed him because they saw their beloved feathered serpent, returned from exile to protect them. Because they saw hope.

But *hope* did little to quench the fire in Olrox's lungs.

Motēuczōmah Xocoyotzin had extended every kindness to his Spanish guests when they'd arrived in the capital. Given them their own quarters in the city while diplomacy took place. But yesterday, Cortés' men had taken advantage of that kindness and massacred a temple full of people.

The people of Tenōchtitlan had grown furious, and the Spanish–cowards that they were–had tried to flee the city under the cloak of night. But the warriors had been watching, and the people–stoked with anger–had been ready. They poured out of their homes armed with *māccuahuimeh* and spears, arrows and stones. Olrox had watched from the skies, picking off runaway soldiers one by one–many of them too encumbered by the gold they'd tried to escape with to outrun his fury.

And now, Motēuczōmah himself was dead. Whether by Spanish fire or any of the countless stones and darts that had been lobbed at him by his own disgruntled populace, Olrox did not know–nor did he care.

Last night had been a hollow victory–because Hernan Cortés still lived.

He turned his face from the crowd gathered below and the sun shining above, retreating to the shadows of the temple where an assembly of Jaguar and Eagle warriors awaited him.

"Where is he?!" Olrox demanded without preamble, and the men lowered their eyes in shame–all but one Eagle warrior.

"He abandoned his men and managed to escape the city to Tacuba, Quetzalcōātzin," he answered. "But with Motēuczōmah Xocoyotzin dead, the Mēxihca Empire is yours for the taking."

Olrox scoffed and paced the floor. The empire was an empty, crumbling thing. More and more cities, frustrated with Motēuczōmah's rule, had recognized an opportunity in Cortés. A chance to have him deliver Motēuczōmah so they could feed upon the carcass like vultures.

"Quetzalcōātzin," a Jaguar warrior chimed in, "if I may?"

Olrox turned to face him, brows raised expectantly.

"We should meet with the Tlaxcaltec," he suggested. "With Motēuczōmah gone, perhaps we could broker a peace. Lift the embargo, convince them to betray their Spanish allies. We could reunite all of Ānāh–"

Olrox squared up to the man's face. "You would have us make peace with the men who helped destroy Cholōllān?" he challenged through gritted teeth.

The warrior cowered back, and Olrox resumed his pacing.

"The Spaniards, the Tlaxcaltec, Motēuczōmah… they all played their part," he explained. "They all owe Cholōllān a debt that can only be paid in blood–and until there is justice, there can be no peace. Do I make myself clear?"

The man swallowed, and the warriors all answered in unison. "Yes, Quetzalcōātzin."

"Find Cortés and bring him to me," Olrox ordered. "Alive."

Tenōchtitlan, Ānāhuac
June 30, 1521

La Noche Triste, the Spanish had dubbed it. *The Night of Sorrows.*

What did these men know of sorrow?

They'd arrived in Cholōllān that October morning, seen the clean streets, the grand temples, the garlands of lilies and orchids. And the only instinct they knew was how to take it for themselves. Take their gold. Take their blood.

Another year had passed, and now instead of running from Tenōchtitlan, Cortés thought he could take it. But this time, there would be no hiding from the summer sun. It would set fire to the dry brush, smoke him out, and burn him to ash.

The blistering heat felt exquisite against Olrox's feathers, and he could sense the terror in the Spaniards' hearts as they realized they were trapped–just as the people of Cholōllān had been that fateful afternoon.

He soared high above the city, watching with satisfaction as soldiers were hobbled at the knees and dragged to the temple in droves, their blood spilled upon the stone in payment to the gods, setting the cosmic ledger to rights. But Olrox would not be satisfied quite yet. Not until it was Cortés whose blood ran down the temple steps.

Cheers erupted from the crowd below, and Olrox's eyes honed in on the armored figure being dragged up the stairs. Sunlight glinted off the polished steel, and knowing his moment had come, Olrox swooped down from the sky.

He flapped his wings as he landed atop the temple, shifting back into his human form. A hush fell over the scene as his shadow blocked out the sun, darkening the altar.

"Hernán Cortés," he announced, striding over. "It's been far too long." He crouched before him and pulled off his helm. "You remember me, don't you?"

The man squinted against the glare of the sun, his skin sizzling where it was exposed to the light. He struggled uselessly to wrest his arms free, but not even his vampiric strength was a match for that of the empire's finest Eagle and Jaguar warriors.

"Dragón." Cortés spat.

"Hm." Olrox tilted his head at him in amusement. "...Close enough," he scoffed and slowly drew out his obsidian dagger, laying it against the man's throat.

"You can kill me," Cortés said, "but there'll only be others. Your empire will fall."

"Empire?" Olrox frowned. "No, no. Empire doesn't concern me. Not the Mēxihca, not the Tlaxcaltec…" He sliced the blade into the man's skin, until red ran in a river down his throat. "Two years ago, you and your men made a stop in Cholōllān, and you took something that didn't belong to you. I'll be taking it back now."

Cortés let out a hiss of pain that turned into a laugh. "If you drink from me, you'll never feel the warmth of the sun again," he warned.

Olrox scoffed. "Oh, I doubt that. You see, I've been chosen by my god, and my god *is* the Sun."

He pressed his mouth to the wound and drank–but he didn't expect it to taste the way it did. Didn't expect it to *feel* the way it did. His thirst for retribution was transforming into something far more visceral. He couldn't stop drinking. He didn't *want* to stop drinking.

Cortés let out a gurgling sound, half laughing, half choking on his own blood. "You and I… we're not so different," he wheezed. "Never satisfied–"

Olrox tore his mouth from his throat. "I am *nothing* like you," he hissed.

He let the serpent take over–to let his prey see his godlike splendor, his divine beauty. But when he spread his wings, something was not right. His feathers began to fall one by one, their lustrous greens and reds wilting into an ashen black and disintegrating as they hit the floor.

The warriors around him drew back and gasped in horror. Screams followed from down the temple steps, accompanied the approaching clamor of armor and swords. Spanish soldiers rushed in, dragging their leader to safety–and Olrox was powerless to stop them as something dark and

powerful coursed through his body.

Olrox writhed as a stabbing pain wracked through his wings and horn-like spines erupted from the bone. His eyes darted around in panic as though someone might be able to provide an explanation, but his warriors were already running—some in terror, some in pursuit of their lost hostage.

At last his eyes landed on his dagger, but the figure reflected back at him in the pitch black glass was something dreadful and draconic he did not recognize.

He was supposed to have protected them; given them hope. But as Olrox gaped at his reflection, he knew that now he would only ever inspire fear.

Castlevania
Sonata of Seasons

In the dreamy silence
Of the afternoon, a
Cloth of gold is woven
Over wood and prairie;
And the jaybird, newly
Fallen from the heaven,
Scatters cordial greetings,
And the air is filled with
Scarlet leaves, that, dropping,
Rise again, as ever,
With a useless sigh for
Rest—and it is Autumn.

"Autumn" - by Alexancer Posey

Autumn

I Hear the Geese

Age Seven

Alucard watches the leaves outside his bedroom window fall to the ground in a vivid pool of browning yellows. Autumn is late this year, and the gleaming, mocking sun makes a fool out of a vampiric mama's boy. His mother goes out and Alucard stays with his father in the castle where he dreams of an overcast sky or even a thunderstorm despite the consequential humidity. He wants to step outside with his mother while the sun hides behind stratus clouds.

He helps her gather things in the woods for her projects, and he learns the names of several plants native to the area. He will then return home to their library and find out more about them, excited to share fun facts with his parents.

Instead, he's stuck inside mid September. He gets bored of his room and walks down the elongated castle hall, his ears picking up the noise of his father flipping pages and following it to their family library. If he asked his father to do something with him, he would. But he looks really into the book he's reading, and all three of them get annoyed when they get interrupted in the middle of a good read.

He instead chooses to lay down on an armchair in the corner of the room, kicking the ancient upholstery so much that dust comes up with every hit. It makes him sneeze, but he continues anyway, watching a spider build a web in the corner of the room.

His father is in the opposite corner in his own arm chair reading but also waiting. It seems like they have no life of their own without his mother there. She is the sun, and they both rotate at her whim. Gladly, of course. His father tells him, "You should read a book until your mother comes back. You can tell her about it at dinner."

"Is that why you're reading?" Alucard asks. His father smiles and places a hand on his chin, looking over at him with adoration.

"In a way." His father's new book is on chemistry. It's one that his mother recently brought over after a quick trip to the town they were near. She reads them first and then his father follows, and they talk about it for hours or even days. Alucard finds plants and animals more interesting, so he doesn't look inside their more complicated books.

But right now, nothing in the library is interesting. Twice he goes through the lower area of the bookshelf where his father placed books he might like at easier access and nothing seems more fun than being outside with his mother.

He turns to ask his father something, but he finds that he has already fallen asleep in those short minutes between. Alucard smiles and slowly

starts stepping away. Although the sound of mice crawling could wake his father, Alucard knows how to be quieter. Losing at hide and seek to your vampire lord father gets really annoying, so he had to learn how to strategize to win.

With soft and quick steps, he makes it down to their kitchen that has a door to the outside. He grabs a black parasol that's hanging on the wall, and he opens it before stepping outside. He takes a few experimental steps outside of the shade of the castle. So far so good. He's not burning alive or whatever is supposed to happen. His parents don't like talking about vampiric deaths with him even being as scientific as they are. There's also a guess that he's not immortal because he's half-human.

Not that he really knows what that means. He's part his father and part his mother. Isn't everyone?

He walks out to the path his mother usually takes and he finds her footprints. He follows them as far as they take him, keeping his parasol up even under the shade of the trees. The sun is following him between the leaves. It feels daunting, like hot air is breathing against his neck. A real threat that might really kill him and could take down a seemingly invincible force like his father.

It feels like a regular stroll until his mother's footsteps stop. It looks like she veered off course into a grassier area, but the wind has undone any shapes she's left in the ground. Alucard turns around and considers walking the same path home and pretending this never happened. But she always takes the same path home. Because he is her child, he hypothesizes that she can't be too far away, and she'll return soon anyways, bumping into him. He decides to stand around and wait.

And when waiting gets boring, he starts wandering into the grassy areas. He calls out to her, but he hears nothing back. He tries to listen for her

and her humming, but he can't make it out with the sounds of various birds singing in a haywire chorus and the wind picking up. He calls out to her again, louder. There's no echo here like there is in their castle.

He walks through the air that pushes back against him and his little parasole. He thinks he can finally hear her, and he relaxes, walking toward her familiar voice when the wind picks up. A gust breaks his parasole inside out and it slips out of his hand, flying out to the trees. Alucard stares at it with wide eyes, frozen in what might be fear. Is this what it feels to be hunted?

He looks up towards the sunlight and then he hears his name. "Adrian?" his mom's voice rings. He looks to her for questions and answers, and her expression is a mix of things he doesn't have time to sort out when they have suddenly uncovered a new world for him.

He is in the sun. He does not burn.

Age 11

Alucard learns how to sew in the middle of autumn. He got a book from a local store depicting Halloween costumes, and he told his parents that he'd like to make his own even if he's not going trick or treating. The idea of dressing like a scarecrow amuses him and although his father raises an eyebrow at the suggestion, he doesn't tell him no.

The castle is cold but in between his parents, he is warm.

He asks his dad how he got good at sewing as he shows him different stitches, and he says that vampires can't really go to the tailors. His mom's

answer was simpler; it was easier to do it herself because she never had time to go to a tailor in the middle of her studies. Her clothes are always getting torn while doing field work.

Alucard likes this time he gets to have both of his parents to himself. It's pretty often despite how busy they keep themselves. Only as of late, he wonders what the company of people other than them would feel like. He sticks at his mother's side in town, always holding onto her hand or the end of her coat. He watches children walk by together in groups, laughing at their inside jokes and living inside their own worlds. He's learned that friends are people that choose each other. He wonders what it's like to have a friend that chooses him and will walk to the book aisle with him.
And still, he finds so many of those kids do not have parents and don dirty clothes with nobody to sew them up or teach them how to sew. He has two perfectly healthy parents at home who coddle him. Why does he want more than that?

He hears his mom whisper to his father sometimes, "We can't keep him inside the castle forever."

"He goes outside."

"You know what I mean." There's a loud sigh of acceptance.

"I do know, yes." There's silence as they think. They're thinkers, those two. "When you open a practice in town, you should take him to live with you." The idea sounds exciting to Alucard, but he feels guilt for leaving his father alone. His mother would feel the guilt, too.

She asks him, "Can you live without him?"

"He can live without me and that's what matters. I don't trust people, but I know he'll be fine with you."

Age 13

It's always been hard to make friends in distant places.The other village families look down on his mother for being unmarried with a child, but they don't know his father is back at the castle, inventing in the name of science and probably love.

Alucard would rather be there, finding new nooks in the castle than sitting in the middle of the village, watching the children play without him. They comment on his pale skin and sharp teeth, but he tells them he can't possibly be a vampire if he's out in the sun. They always believe him, but they never give him a chance.

This isn't the first town where he walks back to the home his mother is renting for them, his head low and shoulders slumped. He steps on dead leaves on the way back, feeling the noise crunch inside his ears. It's a small treat for him.

It's nippy outside, but he's never trembled much.

"Hey, Tepes!" the voice of a boy calls out. Adrian turns around and finds a group of four kids his age approaching him. His instinct is to brace himself for impact, but they don't swing at him. "Do you want to go hang out with us at the stream?" He points in the direction of a local park. It doesn't really have a name, but he and his mother will go there sometimes when they get tired of being inside.

The tug in his stomach wants him to go home, but he feels like he would disappoint his mother if he rejects what seems like a genuine offer for friendship.

"Okay," he accepts, although he's sure they detect the insecurity in his voice. He starts by walking a little bit behind them but one of them slows down and walks with him. He asks a lot of questions and leaves very little room for Alucard to answer.

"Your mom is that new doctor, right? I've never seen a lady doctor before. Are you guys staying here forever? Probably not, huh. Doctors only come when a bunch of us get sick and when we all get better, they leave with our spit in tubes. We got better faster with your mom's medicine, though. And she charged practically nothing." How does he even reply to that? Alucard can only say, "I am glad you all got better."
"Yeah we thought my little sister was going to die, honest. I wouldn't lie about that. But your mom made her better. Do you have siblings?"

"No. It's just me."

"Really? I don't really know only children. You might be the first. I guess it makes sense if your dad is dead." So his mom fed the widow story to this set of villagers. She only uses it if things get bad and only once before this. She already has a hard time being taken seriously, especially in overly religious towns like this one. "Do you miss your dad?"

"All of the time." The kid seems to pick up the gloomy tone and changes the topic to things Alucard doesn't really register. He ends up paying attention to how he's much more dressed up than them, too dressed up for a trip to the stream. If people saw them, he'd look very much out of place with these kids and their tattered clothes and bare feet.

They reach the stream and Alucard doesn't really know what hanging out

with kids his age consists of. Will they make jokes or make a game out of tossing rocks in the water? He doesn't realize he's surpassed them in steps when he turns around and sees them in a line, staring at him. The feeling in his stomach gets worse.

The boy that talks a lot says to him, "You're not that bad. But if you can catch a fish with your bare hands, you can hang with us every day." Is this how people make friends? He blinks a few times, still confused.

"See, I told you he wouldn't do it," one of the other boys whispers. Alucard can hear him fine.

"No, no," the talker shakes his head. "Give him a chance. You'll do it, right?" They all stare at him with their various sets of dirt-smudged faces. Alucard is nervous, but he feels trapped. He can't rush home without revealing he's half vampire.

"Yeah," he says unsteadily. "I'll do it." He takes off his shoes and socks before rolling up his pants. He takes off his jacket and places it on a rock next to them before turning to the stream.

The water would be too cold for the others, but it's fine for him. He takes a few steps in and sees the tiny minnows scatter. He reaches down to grab at one, but he's not fast enough when he's playing human. He gets more flushed as the minutes go by, and he can hear their quiet laughter from a distance. The noise of the water rings in his ears as he tries to sneak up on a solitary minnow and rushes towards it.

Alucard slips face first into the stream, water going up his nose. He sits up and gasps, his entire outfit now wet. He definitely scraped his knees, and he can feel the sting. There's laughter and shouting and for a moment he thinks the boys are running over to help him, but when he focuses his vision, he realizes they are running away with his coat and shoes. He feels

defeated.

He takes the shortcut home which means he uses his vampire powers. Thankfully his mom isn't seeing anyone when he rushes into her arms, and it throws her off balance for a bit. Still, she catches herself and she catches him.

"Adrian? What happened?" she asks in her gentle voice, stroking his hair. He's taking in deep breaths, trying not to cry, but he fails.

He asks between tears, "Am I always going to feel alone?" She squeezes him tight.

"What? No, no. Of course not. I'll be here for a long time. Your father is going to live forever. And I know someday you'll make great friends." He's having a hard time believing her, his stomach still hurting and flesh aching from shame. "How about we get out of here and go visit your father?"

"I want to move back home," Alucard tells her. He's never really told her what he's wanted. He's followed her anywhere she went without question, hoping he'd finally hit the nail on the head of the friendship thing. It seems futile.

"Okay," she agrees easily. "The people here don't make for good friends anyway. Let's go back to our best friend."

Age 17

Alucard spends more time at the castle with his father instead of following his mother to villages where he's bound to have a bad time. She didn't leave for a few years but as of recent months, a cough developed in Wallachia that's been spreading quickly. She's out there doing what she does best, which is healing people. Alucard will never be angry with her over that. He stays home and stares at her empty test tubes and samples instead.

Besides, he's not a little kid anymore. He's gotten used to the loneliness even when his father is an ear shot away.

The castle has been placed in the same area for some time now as all three took a liking to it. The locals in the castle's area don't mind that he has fangs, and he's allowed to travel short distances without worry. He even has friends here and there, in a way. They know his name, and he knows theirs, and they don't try to hurt him. Still, it's hard to fit in. He wonders if there's someone out there in the world who is just like him. Unique in the facet of half human, half vampire. Unique in the facet of having a castle with no laughter of friends to echo through the halls.

He leaves town one day with two books in his hand. One on medicine for his mother and another on geography for his father. He enters the castle door and walks up to their shared library where his father is taking notes from a book he's reading.

"My son," his father greets him without looking up. "How was town?" Alucard places the book on the desk, like a child waiting to see if his dad approves of it. His father picks it up and smiles. "I was going to research sea routes soon. This will be useful. Thank you."

"Sea routes? You've never striked me as the type to want to go sailing."

His dad sits back in his seat and crosses his arms, looking up at him. “I guess this is the best time to tell you.”

“I’m listening.”

“Your mother knows already. It was her idea in the first place. I’ll be traveling by foot soon- like humans do.” Alucard laughs but then realizes he’s serious when his father doesn’t say he’s kidding. How has his father taken to being full human before he has? “What do you think?”

Alucard hides his jealousy. “I think she’ll be proud.”

“I know she will. But do you think it’s a good idea?” he asks. His father coming to him for advice almost seems twisted in the sense that Alucard sees his dad as all knowing.

“It’s an interesting one,” Alucard says. “You’ll learn a lot, and you will get to tell us about it.” He thinks about it a little more and gives his dad a reassuring smile. “It’s a good idea. When do you leave?”
“After your birthday. You should also think about going off and exploring yourself. Maybe make some friends your own age.”

Alucard could laugh again. “Easier said than done. But we will see what the years bring.”

Age 19

His father leaves his chest cut open. He doesn’t finish killing him before he crashes from a wave of emotion and flees, leaving Alucard in a pool of his own blood outside the castle that was once their home.

Alucard needs to survive this. He needs to stop this man he does not know. The overcast of autumn keeps his body cold and heart pumping long enough to get to the tomb and heal in his coffin.

He is the son of a doctor. Of course he can heal.

Age 22

Alucard has friends who chose him and walked to hell and back with him. Maybe they wouldn’t do it again, but they did the first time without asking. He feels warm around them in even the colder months. They make him laugh, and they fill him with a light that makes him think: This is what it’s like to be human with other humans.

He never knew what he was looking for, but he now knows the names Trevor and Sypha that fill that place within. Only now, he is missing the names Vlad and Lisa. It’s a turbulent cycle, but if this is the consequence of love, he’ll have to accept it.

There’s something soothing in the voices of Trevor and Sypha. They bandage each other’s wounds. The autumn leaves still fall to the ground, but it’s not so lonely anymore.

They sit around a fireplace outside the castle despite the inside being warmer. They sit very close together to talk to one another. The sun is setting, and it paints the skies a pretty shade of orange that compliments the browning trees outside the castle.

Sypha looks at Alucard with her hand on her chin and tells him, “You seem happier these days.”

“Yeah, it’s a little creepy,” Trevor says before Alucard can answer and pokes at his arm. In that moment, the geese migrating overhead drop a gift on Trevor’s shoulder. Alucard and Sypha make eye contact, and it breaks when Sypha falls back in loud laughter that echoes through the area.

“Is god fucking with me?” Trevor asks between amusement and disbelief as he stares at the new stain on his sweater. Alucard had just sewn the holes in it shut. Alucard will sew anything for them as long as they don’t bring up the Trevor and Sypha dolls the village children found and still play with.

Alucard tells them, smiling with his fangs showing, “I’m very happy.”

There was a bush with scarlet berries,
And there were hemlocks heaped with snow,
With a sound like surf on long sea-beaches
They took the wind and let it go.

The hills were shining in their samite,
Fold after fold they flowed away;
"Let come what may," your eyes were saying,
"At least we two have had to-day."

"Places [III. Winter Sun"
by Sara Teasdale

Winter

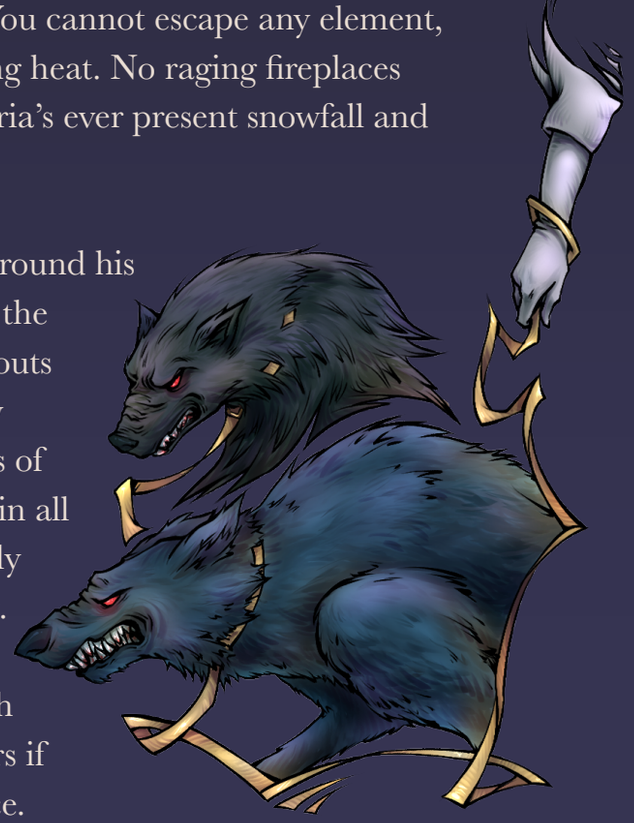
Funeral Rights

The king was wrong.

He never expected to say that about Isaac; his king, friend, and companion. Both men were meant to inherit an empty, joyless world as it was so suddenly decreed by their former lord. They do have their own world now. Smaller, erected from stone and marble, and inhabited by monsters born out of their making along with the odd human brave enough and with nowhere else to go. Hector cannot imagine living outside their little world. He cannot fathom any world without the conviction, the wisdom, or the assurance of Isaac.

But his king was wrong about one thing. You cannot escape any element, be it muscle numbing cold or skin blistering heat. No raging fireplaces or thick furs could shield oneself from Styria's ever present snowfall and bitter winds.

Hector adjusts the dense black fur collar around his chin, tightening his leather gloved grip on the leashes of both wargs. Their elongated snouts filled with rows of jagged fangs ravenously sniff at the snowed over path. Multiple sets of bloodied eyes, blackened voids swimming in all that red, blink out of rhythm then suddenly in unison as they pick up an unusual scent. Pulled along by these grotesque beasts with dark fur coarse enough to cut through skin, his beloved creatures, Hector wonders if this really is some sort of lingering penance.



Perhaps nothing so cruel as actual punishment, but more so a comeuppance or lesson to be learnt. Desire encompassing warmth, receive inescapable coldness.

A thin cloud escapes from Hector's chapped lips. His empty belly craves something hot, close to boiling. The wargs seem to mirror his hungry annoyance in their own way, disappointed that their near perfect instincts have once again led them to another mangled yet frozen solid corpse haphazardly tossed off into the bushes. The lower jaw is completely torn from the base of the head, guts half eaten, eyes like sunken glass, and blood crystalized. Death comes fast in Styria. Before you can struggle in vain, cry from the agony, your veins have already turned to ice while your empty lungs become brittle to the touch.

Nature cares not for that fact; the hounds even less so. Their fangs are sharper than that of a wolf or bear, but they're not interested in cold bloodless stone. Their maws drenched in saliva crave flesh, fresh and dripping. It's what they were promised by their master.

Hector gently shushes one with a loving four-fingered scratch between its ears once the growling rises in volume and ferocity. He is creator, father, and mother to these creatures. He sympathises with each bout of erratic violence every second their target slips further away. Their frustrations are matched only by his own as an occasional sharp inhale is sucked in through his teeth.

There is, at the very least, one promising thing to be taken from this morbid discovery. It is not the first body on their trail and these encounters have steadily become more frequent since they set off on their excursion from the castle. Hector was personally appointed by his king for this task, because who else would Isaac choose? Forgemasters know their night creatures, and if the source of these maulings is indeed a beast of that

calibre, he will complete his mission with efficiency.

Normally, Hector wouldn't have the time or even pity to give a second thought to humans dying because of night creatures. A persistent fault of his which has lingered from his previous life. But if a rampaging night creature is a problem for Isaac, it won't be long until it's a problem for everyone.

He and the hounds press deeper into the skeleton trees, sequestering them within this most uncaring season. They're close now. When the freshly rancid stench of death, desperation, and the expulsion of unmentionable bodily fluids burns his nose all the way down his throat, Hector knows for certain. The hounds know as well, their low growls now crescendoing into the guttural, viscous snapping of their jaws. All three hear it first before they notice a lumbering movement further down the overgrown path. Something much larger than any of them towers over a helpless figure. Even with his gloves, the leashes nearly slice through Hector's palms as both wargs pull against his grip. They will have the fresh meat, blood, and bone they were promised.

Hector only runs after them once he deliberately lets go. The hammer he uses to bring life and just as easily end it weighs on his hip. With any luck, the hounds will do enough. He won't have to unbuckle the very extension of himself. He won't need to be reminded of just how heavy his coveted gift since childhood truly is.

Hector keeps a mental ledger of how many times in his life he's been proven wrong. Never spoken out loud, it is only for himself. This night has quickly turned into yet another addition. One hound acts first, lunging towards the hulking mass of matted fur, bloodied claws at the ends of shredded wings, and a distorted bat-like face. The immediate thing which Hector notices is not the ravaged victim by the creature's clawed feet, but rather its eyes. Neither his cold blue nor Isaac's passionate, haunting red.

Bulging unnaturally out of its wrinkled head, there are only two clouded whites like spoiled milk, bloodshot and rabid.

The next thing which breaks Hector out of his focus on the eyes is a bone-crunching THUD followed by the sharp whine of an animal already accepting its death. Barely a fight between the rogue beast and the reckless warg before the warg's skeleton is crushed by a mere swing of its opponent's winged arm. The other warg has no moment to mourn its brother as it sets upon the larger creature's hunched back, tearing into its curved spine.

"Enough!" Hector's voice directed towards the murderous beast is loud, firm, and never wavers even for that single word. It has to be nothing less when handling any night creature. But this one didn't come from his hammer or Isaac's dagger. It's been operating for who knows how long on its own animalistic instincts, eventually driving itself mad.

Hector has always known where the souls of night creatures come from. Forgemaster, necromancer, whatever one wishes to call such individuals, they can reach down into Hell and emerge unscathed with what they require for a new body. But oftentimes the humanity of the soul will be lost inside the patched up vessel and only a scant few can recall what almost slipped away from them.

Hector has always known where the souls of night creatures come from. Forgemaster, necromancer, whatever one wishes to call such individuals, they can reach down into Hell and emerge unscathed with what they require for a new body. But oftentimes the humanity of the soul will be lost inside the patched up vessel and only a scant few can recall what almost slipped away from them.

This night creature has nothing left. Any humanity from the original soul was burned away in its ascent from Hell and now its monstrous tenden-

cies have been amplified to their most extreme degree. Gone are the intuitions towards fear, self-preservation, and strategy. What remains is a desire to gorge itself on warm fleshy pulp, lap up pools of exposed viscera, then toss aside the scraps before hunting down its next indulgence.

This is where both forgemasters differ regarding the creature's fate. Isaac wants this thing dead so his kingdom can exist in peace. Hector wants it dead because it will be a mercy for the creature.

The remaining warg manages to hold its own despite how much tossing and flailing the other night creature has done to throw it off its back. In the frenzy, the mangled figure practically buried in the ground is finally released from the creature's grasp. They are only Hector's second priority and even then, it's doubtful they still live.

He withdraws the hammer from his belt and in a moment of unshakeable precision, swings it against the creature's jaw. Not enough to break it but just enough to smash its remaining equilibrium while Hector flips the hammer and aims the scythe-shaped end at the very centre of the beast's forehead. It's been a long time since he's had to do this but his grip is a reminder of how exactly the quick yet brutal process should be done in order to achieve the most satisfying result.

Perhaps things could have been different for this beast. Either man could have found it earlier on, taken it in and helped to stabilise the rotted core behind those foul milky whites. It would have never compared to the more upstanding and near-human night creatures that wander about the castle grounds, but it nevertheless would have had its place.

Hector won't let his conscience be swayed by romantic what ifs. He no longer finds any real purpose, reward, or resolution in wallowing in those thoughts. In a split second, he has only one as the hammer's tip breaks through the night creature's skull and tears through the crevices of its

blighted brain.

You should have been made with more care.

Hector stands, immovable and with a subdued expression, watching as the monster gurgles blood before taking its last grating breaths. His stained hammer is swiftly cleaned upon the fresh snow then holstered, its owner confident in the thought that Isaac will be pleased. Not with the sacrifice of one of their wargs, but rather in the knowledge his kingdom and subjects are safe for the time being. But there are threats everywhere. And Hector knows he will enjoy the peace and company of his king for but a fleeting time until taking back up his hammer for purposes opposite of creating new life.

Before he and the surviving hound can retrace their journey, a nagging voice at the back of Hector's mind reminds him to check the body. He had assumed the worst (or rather the most probable) outcome and was ready to take his leave. That is, until he sees their back rise then fall. Slight movements, barely noticeable, yet signs of clinging life all the same.

Hector carefully turns them over, mindful of whatever injuries they received which don't appear to be very many. A few shallow gashes, a chewed up ankle, and a dislocated shoulder; perhaps the beast finally wore itself out before it could tear into such ample prey. But it's only when their face is revealed that a look of shock washes over Hector's own. The same tousled shoulder-length hair the colour of unpolished silver, same aquiline nose, same ice blue eyes behind lids which open slightly then shut tight after each pained wince. The only differences between the two being the thinner, much thinner body frame dwarfed by their supposed Good Samaritan and their paler, ghostly skin against Hector's soft

brown. Then there are the rags, thick, layered, yet all but torn to shreds.

It isn't looking into a mirror so much as it is looking into one's reflection upon the water's surface while gentle ripples distort the truth.

"Are you an angel coming to take me away?" Their voice is less than a whisper. Hector almost furrows his brow at the absurdity of their query until he looks closer at the encroaching cloud around their eyes, the pitch blackness coating their fingers, hands, and bare feet, and just how fragile they feel in his arms.

What do you say to someone who might as well be dead?

"Just a passing forgemaster. No angels here." Hector then feels the inconvenient sting of empathy driving itself into his previously embittered heart. "Is there some place you'd like me to take you in the meantime?"

The stranger breaks through their confusion brought on by irreversible hypothermia to speak again, forcing words through withered lips. They raise their hand and point towards the deeper woods. "My hut atop that hill... I was dragged out."

Hector's gaze follows the frostbitten digit and soon finds the ramshackle cabin in question, possibly constructed from no more than a dozen desolate planks of wood. It reminds him of the first shelter he built himself when he exited childhood thanks to fire and murder. When trying to help the hermit onto their feet ends in failure, Hector lifts them right out of

the bloodied snow. He carries them up the hill, the other warg impatiently nipping at his heels the entire way.

"You're a forgemaster..."

"Is that a problem?"

Whether yes or no, he never receives an answer either way. After leaving the perpetually growling warg on watch just outside, Hector steps through the poor excuse for a door. There isn't much at his disposal: a series of frozen stiff blankets and the abandoned start of a meagre fire. It will have to do. He himself managed to survive with much less.

"For someone so covered in death… you seem determined to keep me alive."

Hector's eyes reflect the weak flames which steadily grow. All it takes is a little bit of magic and the mental intent that must always accompany it.

"You basically said it yourself; you're already dead. No amount of charity will change that." He recalls the clear signs of malnutrition, hypothermia, and illness on the hermit's body. They would have been an easy kill for the night creature had he not been there.

"Least I can do is make your exit from this world more comfortable."

The hermit spits out a dry cough that should have been a laugh. "Some would say that is charity itself."

Before Hector can debate that assumption, they're interrupted by a lonely, drawn-out howl from the guarding warg. Perhaps it does truly miss its brother.

"I'm sorry about your other dog."

One more peculiar thing for the hermit to say. As if Hector's creations are everyday animal companions, like pets or service hounds, instead of the monsters which Dracula and Carmilla once sought to use. Silence passes while he thinks of what to say, but the hermit, despite their fading constitution, surges ahead of him with another bizarre question.

"Do you ever mourn your creations?"

"... Sometimes. But most are created for a specific purpose. If they die, they die trying to serve that purpose. The soul is then set free and the new body is left either to rot or to be reconfigured. I suppose there's some comfort to be found in that cycle."

"Spoken like a true resurrectionist..."

Spoken like someone on their deathbed who knows more than they're letting on. But Hector banishes that assumption, snapping another twig in half to throw in the fire. The hermit could be someone beyond his understanding or an ordinary person who was both enlightened and brought down by the world's many strange teachings.

"Do you think--" Another violent coughing fit. Flecks of spit laced with bloody spots coat the hermit's mouth before they clear their ravaged throat enough to continue speaking. "Do you think your kind... forgemasters... if you've been robbing humans."

"Robbing them of what?"

"The privilege of death. Of rot."

Hector repeats the query in his mind like a weaver's wheel, spinning it

over and over until it comes out as something he can better comprehend. Once he's finished his internal toiling, Hector can only arrive at one conclusion based on what he perceives the hermit is asking of him: he should feel offended.

How dare this stranger at the end of their existence spend it by insulting what they only know from hearsay. Perhaps that is the very reason why they ask such a misdemeanour. Death has come for them, what else do they have to lose? But the privilege of decay and rot? Most humans don't even deserve that much. And even for the ones who do, forgemastery is not the business of robbing that so-called privilege. It only spares a subject from the inevitability.

"I know you're dying, but don't be ridiculous. Forging is the act of respecting a corpse, not desecrating it. Transfiguring it into something stronger, more powerful."

The hermit shifts slightly beneath their rags. Comfortably, gently, yet it is the last movement their bones and muscles might ever commit to. "I guess I'm only worried that once I'm gone, you'll turn me into one of your creations. As a way of making me live longer than I should."

"It wouldn't still be you. Just your body."

"Then all the more reason to not use it. Just allow me that rot."

Compassion has always been a fickle thing for Hector. Complicated when it comes to the matter of humanity and whether they deserve his finite sympathy when none was ever extended toward him. Humans, vampires; they're all the same with precious little difference. Yet he saved this stranger despite it not mattering in the near end. He carried them home, started a fire for them, and is now listening to their final words. His next dispute is presented as a question, and teeters on the edge between the continu-

ous need to understand this hermit and his lingering thorny feelings.

“Why should I allow it?”

The hermit musters up what could be their last bout of mortal life before expelling it from their lungs--less an exasperated sigh and more like the painful rasps from a forgotten animal left to die in the bushes.

“People do so much to live forever. Not just in writing, but physically. They break their bodies, then break other bodies when that doesn’t work for them. If they cannot be immortal, then they must prolong their lives any way they can. I simply want to leave quietly and with whatever dignity I have left. Let the dirt ruin my fingernails, let the animals have a decent meal of my flesh, and let the maggots take care of the rest. My bones will decorate this forest as another one of its many stories. What could be more peaceful than that?”

Two sets of winter blue eyes meet each other--one clear and focused, the other clouded and fading fast--as the hermit gives Hector a gentle ultimatum. “If you were to take my body and refashion it into one of those beasts, I would be disappointed in you. Even if my soul no longer inhabits it.”

The isolated cabin, crumbling piece by piece just as its sole inhabitant does almost in tandem, falls into silence. Neither Hector nor the hermit have anything to say. One forgoes their voice (save for shallow wheezing in place of breath) because there is no strength or energy left. Their parting speech drained them of everything.

The other keeps his mouth closed and his gaze turned away because he won’t dispute this discussion. He cannot. Hector still believes, perhaps stubbornly so, that forging must involve respect towards the dead. So, he decides his next act of grace will be to allow a corpse the last word and

their final wish.

Night carries on. Snow continues to drift gently down from the skies. The hermit takes longer to leave this world than expected. Yet Hector remains, watching as their chest finally settles. They can’t be buried; even if the ground wasn’t frozen solid, the snowfall would make things difficult. Hector briefly considers burning the body (who doesn’t fantasise about being honoured like the Vikings) until he remembers their tricky final wish.

“Allow me that rot...” He whispers.

Many things could give the hermit just that. The elements, the earth, animals, insects, maggots, the changing seasons. If he were to simply leave them be, they could have all of that and more. The notion itself feels rather careless, so Hector fiddles together a shroud which wraps their entire body before carrying the now faceless hermit outside. He hears a small whine from the guarding warg as it lifts its head in curiosity.

It’s done. The hermit’s frail body, snow already accumulating within every sharp groove and curve--fits perfectly in a nearby trench.

Hector leaves no prayers, no parting words. He’s been gone long enough and the king will be worried. He imagines what Isaac might say when he returns in quiet victory. He’ll ask if anyone was killed and Hector, unable to be dishonest with the king, will say yes. Maybe he’ll mention the hermit and their views on forgemastery. Maybe he won’t.

There’s another ‘maybe’ hidden away in Hector’s thoughts. In spring when patches of green overtake the Styrian landscape, if only for a brief time, he will walk down this same path to find flowers sprouting through the gaps of an abandoned ribcage picked clean by animals. Perhaps a field mouse will skitter forth from an empty eye socket belonging to the

skull which is now its home.

Hector might find a number of new oddities come spring. For now, trudging back through the trees heavy with fresh snow, loosened grip on his surviving warg, he eases out of his melancholia and turns his mind towards a raging hearth while sharing something hot with his king.

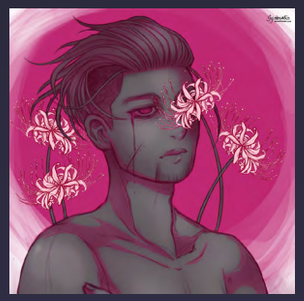
Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.

by Henry Ford

we proudly present the

Castlevania "Sonata of Seasons" -Team!

Spring



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Page 6
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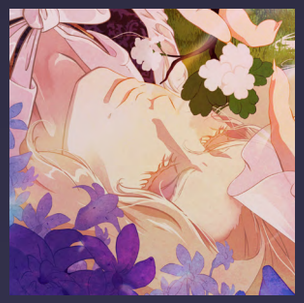

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Page 7
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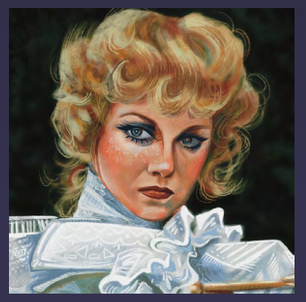
hermannco.bsky.social
H3rmannco
h3rmannco

Page Artist
Page 9
Kal

ruanauden
ruanauden
ruanauden
ruanauden

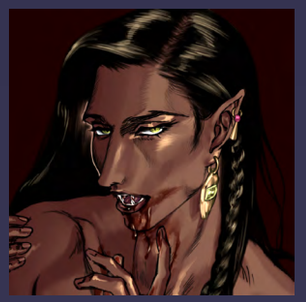
Author
Pages 10 - 27 “Pushing Daisies, Planting Roots”
Jess

AquaWings23
ghostslovegays
ghostslovegays



Spot + Merch Artist
Pages 10 - 27 | Postcard
velyzebub

velyzebub
velyzebub



Page Artist
Page 28 + Page 29
func44

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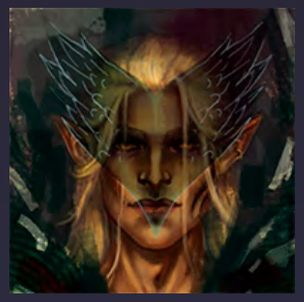
Summer



Page Artist
Page 30
Saint Rook

saint.rook
saint-rook.bsky.social
elaine-caed
saint_rook

Page Artist
Page 31
Pop

pop-peroni
pop_peroni
pop_peroni

Page Artist
Page 34 + 39
LittlekittenAmy

littlekittenamy
littlekittenamy
littlekittenamy

Page Artist
Page 35
Crimsontangerines

Crimsontangerines
crimsontangerine
Crimsontangerin

Page Artist
Page 36
trace

exanacht
exanacht
exanacht

Page Artist

Page 37

Toby Fox

tobyfoxart

tobyfoxart

tobyfoxart

Page + Spot Artist

Page 56/57 | Pages 68 - 81

FKDemetri

FKDemetri

FKDemetri

FKDemetri

Page Artist

Page 38

lizkreates

lizkreates

lizkreates.bsky.social

Guest Page Artist

Page 58/59

galaxygaby

galaxygaby

kundool

galaxygaby

Author

Page 40 - 55 “Punishing Heat”

Vanish

ifishouldvanish

ifishouldvanish

ifishouldvanish

ifishouldvanish

Page + Spot Artist

Page 40 - 55 | Page 60/61

Mystery

Mysteryanimator

Mysteryanimator

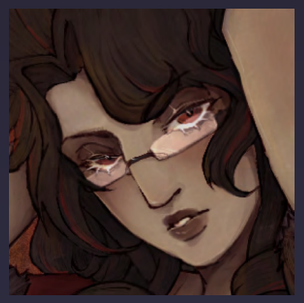
MysteryratedR

Autumn

Page Artist
Page 64
brkenteacup
brkenteacup
brkenteacup.bsky.social
BrkenTe4cup

Page Artist
Page 65
GrathVonGraven
vongraven
gvgraven1

Page Artist
Page 66
Juniper Chuang
junjun0235
junjun0235
junjun0235



Page Artist
Page 67
Voidbitzz
Voidbitzz

Author
Pages 68 - 81 “I Hear The Geese”
Star
staristired
kyonagichar

Page Artist
Pages 82/83
Elaiz
Elaiz
elaiz
elaiz
Elaiz_al

Page Artist
Page 84/85
Katon
katon4525
katoncomics.bsky.social
Katon_Comics

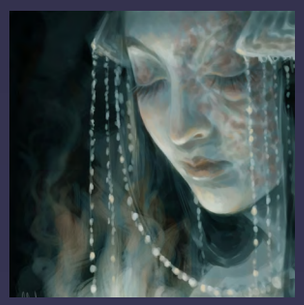
Winter

Page Artist
Page 88
Spectralfusion

spectralfusion
spectralfusion
spectralfusion

Page Artist
Page 89
Grass

grass0_o
grass
grass0_o



Page Artist
Page 90 + 106
Mal Cao

magid_mal
magidmal.bsky.social
magidmal
Magid_Mal

Page Artist
Page 91
Rosangela Ludovico

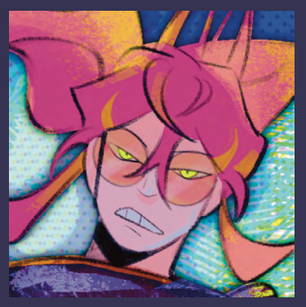
cyborgize.it
devilrose
devilrose.art

Guest Author
Pages 92 - 105 “Funeral Rights”
Aquila

aquilaofarkham
aquilaofarkham
belllmonts
belllmonts

Spot + Merch Artist
Pages 92 - 108 | Wallpapers
Eliana Cadelina

bookercatcheli
bookercatcheli



Page Artist
Page 107
GOMHYU

gomhyu
gomhyu.bsky.socia
gomhyu

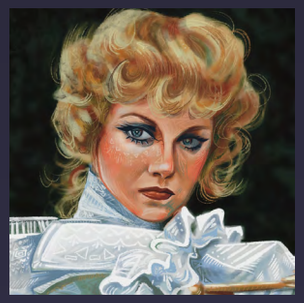
Merch

Page Artist
Page 108
Madbrake
mad_brake
madbrake.bsky.social
madbrake

Merch Artist
Icons
Lamon
Lamon_art
lamon-art
Lamonart

Cover

Artist
Cover Illustration
Aiden
aidenofwolves
aidenofwolves



Spot + Merch Artist

Pages 10 - 27 | Postcard

velyzebub

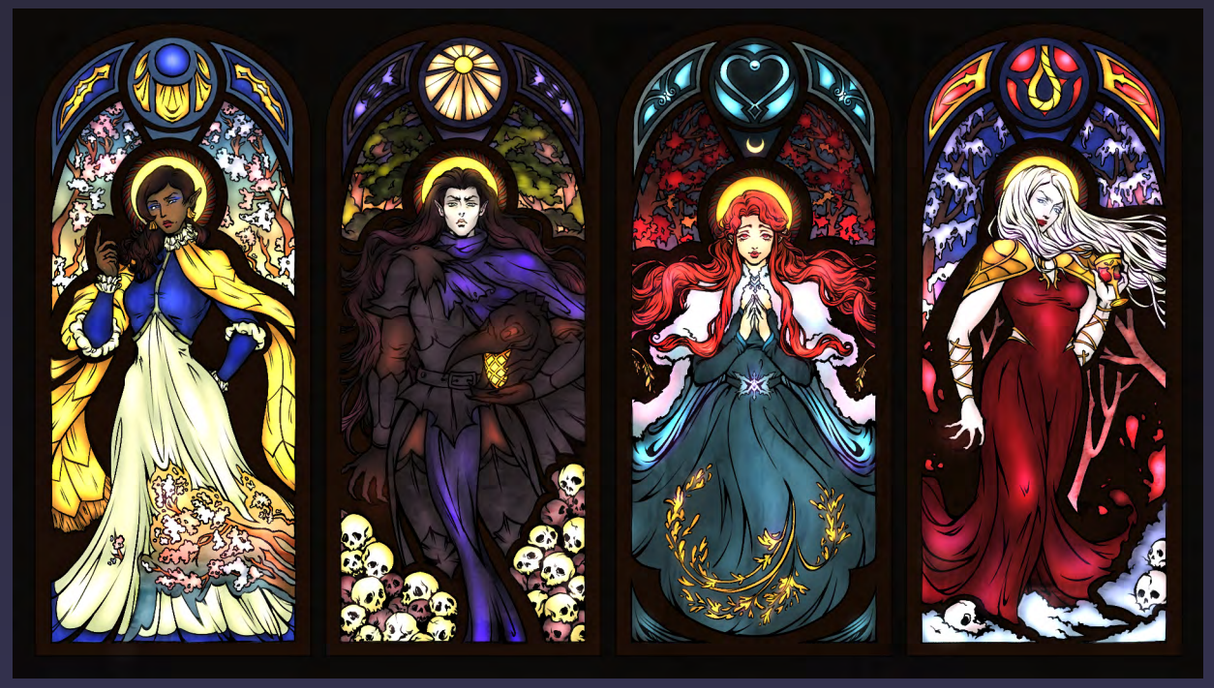
velyzebub velyzebub

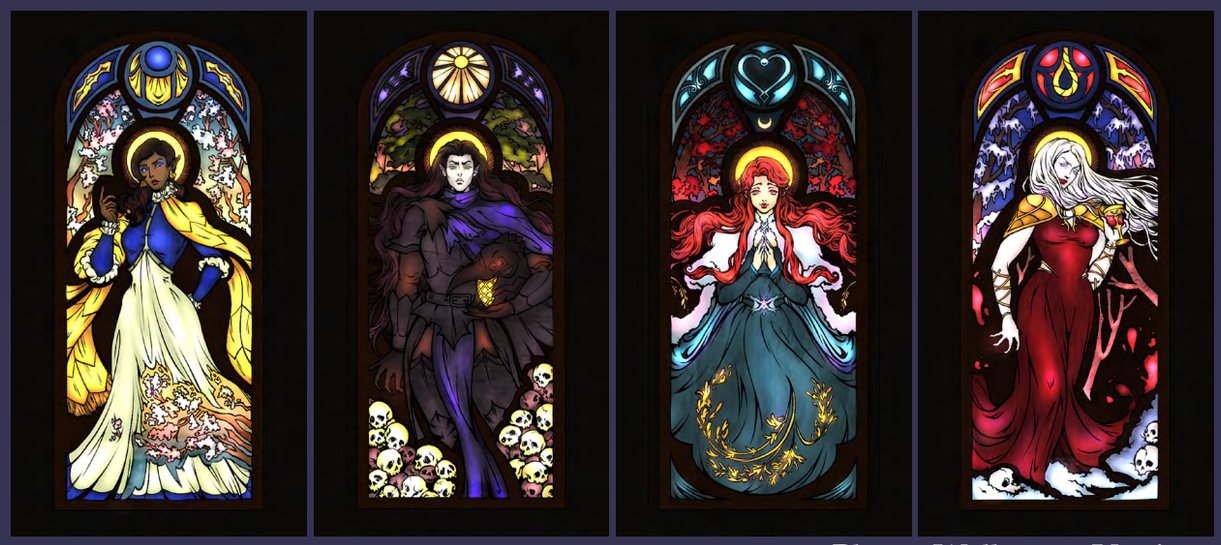
Spot + Merch Artist

Pages 92 - 108 | Wallpapers

Eliana Cadelina

bookercatcheli bookercatcheli





Phone Wallpaper Versions

Moderators

Head + Social Media Mod

Carmen

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tragicperformer.carrd.co
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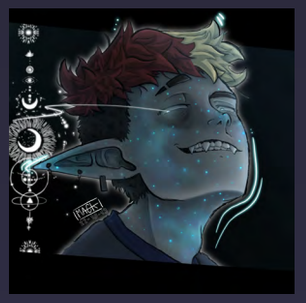

Art + Formatting Mod

Mack

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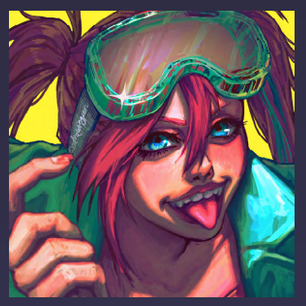
Support Mod

AKnightOfAGoodKing

flame_chiyo
the-kings-of-games



Graphics Mod

Feru

ferumeruderu
ferumeruderu
ferumeruderu

Writing Mod

Keats

keatsblue
keatsblue
keatsblue
keatsblue

Intern

Tova

tovanish

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